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LIFE'S SHADOWS

Vol. II

A DAUGHTER'S SHADOW

BY

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MADRAS.

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A DAUGHTER'S SHADOW

When I mused after a lapse of six years to complete the cycle of 'Life's Shadows' in other family relationships, the 'Daughter's Shadow' among them, Shakespeare's play KING LEAR flit across my mind. When at the age of fifteen, I read the story in Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare, it struck me that Shakespeare had been very cruel to Lear. I could understand the nemesis of character and the tragedy in Macbeth because of his ambition, of Othello because of his jealousy (as I later noticed among men who had pretty wives) and of Hamlet, the phlegmatic thinker. Later, when I read the play itself, I was not quite satisfied, despite commentators and literary critics that Lear deserved such cruelty at the hands either of his daughters, or of Nature featuring in storm and thunder, in driving him mad finally. Critics may say that his madness was the result of the barbaric age which he lived in and of his ungovernable temper. I wonder if even a strong man, at eighty years of age, could have a governable temper, what with the physical causes leading to the deterioration or excess production of various glandular products like adrenalin etc. in the human body, and what with high blood pressure and other ills of old age. I am not so sure that the barbaric age should have created such passion and cruelty in his young daughters, nor can repression in their youth by their father suffice to explain their vengeful spirit of wanton cruelty, as if to satisfy the small whims of a retired Royalty is a serious matter in royal households.

Perhaps we are apt to misunderstand those days and imagine them wrongly. Anthropologists like Professor G. Eliot Smith say that primitive man was

certainly more chaste towards woman than civilized man. Shakespeare, in the subsidiary story of Gloucester in the play, represents all the vices of a civilized age, say of being untrue to the marriage tie. Is not the branding of a child as a bastard itself a type of cruelty of so-called civilization, for every child is born naturally? Is it not because of the feeling of high blood in the social ladder of classes of the aristocracy and the common people, that the idea of the bastard takes root in the mind of man, leading to the debasement of the child's character and his later hatred for the world, because he was born out of wedlock? Has not the better sense of the people of Norway in recent years, removed all laws against illegitimacy by its enactment of 1915, making provision for the child's proper upbringing and education in addition to taking the father's surname? The Hindu law-giver has therefore created the 'anuloma' form of marriage, entitling the child to a share of the father's property.

Commentators also urge that the insistence of a public avowal of love by his daughters was due to Lear's imperialistic nature. Is any part of a king's or queen's life private, and not subject to public gaze, and the surveillance of his ministers in the modern age? For, a king's child cannot be born in the privacy of an ordinary household for the suspicion that the child may be substituted. His daily acts, even of rising from bed and sleeping, are commemorated in songs etc. of his warders, at least so far as Indian kings were portrayed in tales. Shakespeare, in this drama, sees the animal in man to an extraordinary extent and his reference to the large number of animals in God's creation and the comparison of the qualities of the *dramatis personae* with those of lower animals is noticeable even by the ordinary reader.

There is, however, the relieving feature of Cordelia in the play where humanity and love come back for insistence on the human mind that man and woman are still good by nature and that there is hope for mankind. I learnt, however, of the sobbing of humanity. Cordelia's prototype Antigone in Sophocles' play, has appealed to me more as the "perfect" daughter in her attitude and conduct, very true to the ideal of the Hindu. Such conduct may be seen even today in widowed daughters serving their aged fathers in Hindu households.

The next great author who deals with the daughter's shadow is Honore de Balzac (1799-1850) of France. Many may not have read his 'Le Pere Goriot' or 'Old Goriot' in the English translation. Saintsbury admits that Balzac took his suggestions from 'King Lear', but Goriot has only two daughters, Anastase and Delphine, and no third child.

Goriot was a very careful thrifty workman in the employ of a vermicelli maker. Later, he bought his master's business when the latter lost his life in an accident in the disturbances of 1789. He was an authority on all questions relating to corn, flour, production and storage and quality of food grains. His plain good sense and business ability enabled him to make millions in subsequent years. He had an income of sixty thousand francs a year and continued to be a vermicelli maker. Both his girls were endowed by nature with many personal accomplishments and he spared no money for their education. The daughters lavishly spent money to adorn themselves and to ride in carriages. They attracted the aristocracy. The elder married a count and her social aspirations for a more exalted sphere were satisfied. The younger desired more money and married a banker who was a baron. Goriot by these connections had to give up his

vermicelli making. Because the daughters wanted large sums of money to lead their frivolous Parisian lives, Goriot, even with his income of sixty thousand francs a year, lived in the worst scum area on barely twelve hundred francs a year. It so happened that the elder was more beautiful, while the younger was just pretty. The younger, in spite of her wealth, could not get admission to aristocratic society, for which partly her elder sister was responsible. Thus the daughters came not to like each other, as in Shakespeare's play. Further, their parentage was never forgotten by the society in which they wanted to live.

The old man, as he got older, is painted by Balzac as a sort of an idiot outside his trade abilities, with an enormous love for his daughters and seemed to live for the very pain they gave him. He was not wanted by his sons-in-law, and could visit his daughters only on the sly. They came to him only when they wanted money and he had to use all stragem even to see them occasionally. Their need for money arose not solely because of expensive habits, but of their illicit love-affairs, and for the payment of the gambling debts of their lovers.

The old man died with their names on his lips, and with a peroration. "My friend, do not marry, do not have children. You give them life, they give you your death-blow; you bring them into the world, and they send you out of it," almost as historic as Lear's curse of barrenness on his daughter. The daughters did not even see him on his death-bed though sent for. When the news of his death reached them, only empty carriages with the armorial bearings of the count and the baron followed the hearse. The priests, chorister and offer of prayers were paid by his pension-mates, and the only thing that accompanied the old man into the coffin, in memory of his love, was a locket

containing the curly hair of his children with their christian names engraved on either side. The tragedy of man in Balzac's story is complete, without any picture of a good woman.

II

I have been on the look out for actual instances where in spite of all the goodness prevailing in ordinary ways of life, an aged person might still feel the tragic in his own life towards his very end. Such men have a lesson to convey to us. I felt almost that I was blind all these long years in not having understood my friend Hariharan.

From all I knew of him, I presumed he had been a fairly happy man, though he had his share of affliction and sorrow in early life. How he came to feel so severely the tragedy of life, it was rather difficult to probe into. But from the scraps of notes left in his diary which had not been written up regularly like Amiel's Journal, but at occasional intervals when passing through emotional stress and strain, and from the later conversations I have had with some of his friends, for generally he was a very silent person, I have reconstructed his life story. Let the readers judge for themselves this type of a mute, inglorious tragic hero.

He was about seventy years of age when he came to my nursing home with a peculiar request—that he should be allowed to die in peace there, though I knew he had daughters and grandchildren, as he felt he had not many more days to live. His last behest to me was that his rebuilt house on the plot of land where once a cottage stood in Jambukeswaram, might be renamed the 'Avvai Home' and I be the trustee in charge. He said the house-site with its vegetable garden was hallowed in his memory and that the house should

"Very many gentlemen have known my brilliant success in the examinations and my nomination to sit for the competitive examination. They were willing to offer me their daughters in marriage. I hesitated whether such a marriage with girls used to higher comfort would make my life happy. On the information that the medical board had thrown me out, these gentlemen have dropped me like hot cinder. It is time enough that I should earn and relieve my mother of her hard life. By ill-luck I have lost all chances for worldly advancement. I am barred by age-limit to sit for further examinations; nor is it any use. The career as a teacher in the very school where my father worked is open to me and I shall accept the post on thirty rupees per mensem which the college authorities are willing to offer me, though the prospects are poor. I shall have to set right my eyesight by glasses very soon.

"Mother presses me to marry. Should I, with an alleged slight weakness of the heart, probably due to rheumatic or other fevers in my boyhood? True, I should please mother, yet I do not wish to thrust an early widowhood upon a girl; my mother's life is sufficiently piteous.

"I witnessed today a recitation competition of the Bhagavad Gita, of some girls who were allowed to choose their own verses therefrom, conducted in the Town Hall under the auspices of a Sanskrit Association recently started for the revival of Hindu religion. A pretty girl's voice transported me, and I learnt later that her name was Chandrika and she ~~was~~ the daughter of the Sanskrit pandit of my high school. In the competition she recited verses of the Gita from the Tenth Discourse, describing the greatness of Lord

Krishna, from the twenty-second verse with the words, 'Of the Vedas, I am the Sama Veda,' right up to Verse Thirty-five, 'Of the seasons, I am the flowery Spring.' When she came to Verse Thirty-six she repeated up to 'I am the gambling of the cheat' and then her memory failed her. The judge suggested 'I am the splendour of the splendid', but still her mind was a blank regarding the second line of that verse. In spite of this small defect she got the prize for the best rendering in sweet rythmic tone.

"Should I ask the father to offer her to me in marriage?

"When I sought her parent at his house, he was so joyful. He referred to the fact that bridegrooms' prices were going up by leaps and bounds especially of an educated bachelor. I told him I wanted no money but his daughter. I told him also of the doctor's verdict and asked him if he was prepared to offer his girl to me though I was fairly healthy outwardly. He is a believer in astrology. He said his daughter's horoscope was of a 'Dirgha Sumangali' (or long married life, envisaging death before her husband), and he blessed me with a long life and a happy marriage for the gladness I brought unto his life, 'which good deed will stand by me'."

Hariharan shifted within six months to the metropolis, resigning his teacher's job on accepting a post in the provincial government's Account Office. This job was obtained for him by a recommendation of his compeer who was well connected and selected to the gazetted post in the very examination he stood first. Hariharan was not sure whether he should

congratulate himself for the patronising attitude of his class-mate and be thankful for small mercies since the bitterness of his mind for the loss of the post was not yet forgotten. He thanked the class fellow of course for his kindness, since he was very particular in leaving the place of his childhood and adolescent life which carried sad memories. As the medical examination for clerkships was not so strict as for gazetted posts, he was selected. He shifted with his wife and mother to Madras.

In the humdrum life in an Account Office and the routine checks as applied by a clerk to accounts, brilliant talent too gets stale and the mind loses its elasticity. Month after month, the same set of accounts from treasuries showing no variety or very little of it palls upon the mind. The office was not like the present day one, where talent could aspire to rise to higher positions with better pay. Once get in at the bottom of the ladder and one stays there forever, only slowly pushed up by vacancies arising. Hariharan's compeers would notice that he would finish the work allotted to him in less than half the time taken by them and that he would pore over some book or other in the office. As a new comer from a southern district, things had even come to a head in which he was reported to his higher authority for wasting his time in office and that his work would be slipshod on that account. In the beginning he would take no notice of such rumours. Latterly however, he told the officer under whom he was working, that he was prepared to take a challenge that few mistakes could indeed be detected in his work. He had even later to address, though half-heartedly, his class-fellow the Deputy Collector to write to some of the officers in the Account Office that he might be fairly judged and that the authorities might not be carried away by baseless

rumours. He had indeed to wait long for recognition of his talent, at least for its conversion into Rs., as., ps. to helping him to a more comfortable life. There were no accelerated increments for men who passed early the departmental examinations akin to a Marshal's baton in his knapsack; nor was there a selection in a third of the vacancies in higher grades for men who showed great promise.

In the earlier portion of his career, he was often disgusted with the insanitary surroundings about him in the city where he had perforce to live, for he had not estimated the higher cost of living at Madras as compared with the living in Jambukeswaram, with fresher air, more cleanly living and bath in the rivers. His mother after about two years' stay with him, yearned to go back to the cottage in Jambukeswaram. So he took a two months' holiday. His mother, fortunately for her, passed away in her husband's ancient home and Hariharan was thankful to the Powers that be, that he was with her during her last days to consign her body to the flames.

It was during this holiday and now that he was married, that his mother opened her heart to him. She said, "You are hardly conscious of the temptations and difficulties of a penniless widow who had not taken off her hair as was the custom, and of the vicious minds of some of the Brahmin folk who were making money as cloth merchants, or in municipal contracts or in engineering contracts of irrigation works about the Cauvery delta. I was a good cook and had the knack of preparing savoury sweets. Thus my services were in demand on many marriage and festive occasions by the rich ladyfolk. I was sorely tried with the hard work before large fires kindled to make the sweets. To be true and chaste to the memory of your father in the midst of such toil, when I could have

led an easy life, was indeed a difficult task. How is it that the newly rich among the Brahmin men-folk were so ungodly in spirit, and had lost their moral rectitude? They may be exceptions but earning for my livelihood and your education had thrown me into their houses. But those days are happily past. I am indeed very proud of your wife who is so good to me, would read the sanskrit Ramayana in the original, and explain to me the meaning, verse after verse, for these two years. Eh! Is she not the grand-daughter of a Mahopadhyaya (great scholar in Sanskrit)? Now that my life is fast ebbing, I am sorry that I have had no grandchild to fondle."

After his mother's death, which was quite unexpected, he felt that he was left alone and adrift without a compass, and as if he had lost his support. His diary, showing the then state of his mind, had the following paragraphs:—

"For years I have not visited the temple. I lost my bearings, and understanding of the purpose of life, since the medical board rejected me. The spirit of scoffing arose within me. After all, what could a stone idol or image, know of the suffering of bleeding humanity? The supreme thing in this world, as I have realised today, is the unselfish love of the mother for her child evinced atleast up to the age it needs her support. The human foetus sucks all its necessary life-blood from the mother; after birth the child takes all the nourishment it needs by sucking the mother's milk, even to the detriment of her health. The father takes over charge of the child and he too has to sweat and work for its growth up to manhood, after it comes forth as an individual unit of humanity. It is unfortunate that my mother had to bear the brunt of both parents, though society gave me a half-feed for many years. I must keep the memory of her love

afresh in my mind daily. I will buy a picture of 'Amba' the 'Mother of the World' and lay flowers at her feet in the home. The human mother alone knows instinctively the meaning of life, and the need for its continuity. I need not show to the world the change of my heart.

"Marriage for woman gives economic security to her and stabilizes the institution of the family. That is why our ancient Rishis laid down the law that every woman must be married. Manu, the law-giver, said, 'A woman must be either under the protection of the father or the husband or the son.' If Nature is cruel and takes away the protecting husband, naturally her lot becomes difficult in Hindu India, unless she has a father to fall back upon, before her son is able to support her. To some extent, economic security of the woman in India was secured by law, long before Europe provided for it, in that **stri-dhana** or **manjakani** (acres of land with the saffron given at the time of the marriage) bestowed by the father and her personal jewellery are her own and the husband cannot touch it without her consent. That property is handed down from mother to daughter, to stand her for her wintry days."

Having lost the link with his past life, he now bestowed more attention on his wife, and began to understand her. The early romance of his choice having cooled down, his mother's last words about her gave him the clue for a proper appreciation of her.

III

The few books he purchased after he began to earn (the dates of purchase were noted on them) gave me some clues as to his occupation during leisure hours. For the first few years, he was pursuing the study of higher mathematics meant for the Master of

Arts course, and his mind apparently took delight in its abstract principles.

During his collegiate course, the study of Mathematics, a very jealous subject, demanded much of his time. The examinations did not favour very much any original thinking but a large facility for working out problems. Though he tried to understand the principles of higher mathematics, examinations meant a laborious task of keeping a ready memory for the various types of questions which might be put to answer. He himself was now surprised how his mind had taken to the study of mathematics at college and later, with no very serious background of an environment for such study. After some time he threw mathematics overboard, as the subject looked like a desert waste in the matter of satisfying the surging emotional life within him. For instance, it looked sad to him that his father-in-law, the son of a great Sanskrit scholar, should just carry on as a petty teacher of Sanskrit in the high school, while his compeers in the field of English education had been shown better regard and given more pay.

After this change in his outlook, he came across three books by Sir Francis Galton—'Hereditary Genius', 'English Men of Science, their nature and nurture' and 'Enquiries into the Human Faculty'. After he studied them it dawned on him that he, as a Brahmin and a torch-bearer of the intellectual tradition of South India, should hand down that age-long tradition to his children, when they were born; for he said, 'Every child begins afresh in its acquisition of knowledge.'

After his marriage he developed a real taste, not only for English literature but also for Sanskrit literature, though both the subjects had been compulsory in the degree examination. His wife was

responsible for the creation of this taste. Her education in Sanskrit at the time of her marriage was very meagre and her inborn linguistic taste demanded further satisfaction. The greater Sanskrit poets and dramatists, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, were read by them together.

A son was born to him sometime after his mother's death. Their joy will be evident from the following:

"In spite of my father-in-law's request that I should send her to his house for her confinement, I have kept her with me at Madras for the medical help which I could get at the Women's Hospital. I am not sure whether my own physical weaknesses were due to heredity, beyond the control of my parents, or whether they were due to my environment of food, nourishment and other factors. Modern medical knowledge of the West has taken immense strides, and I should certainly take advantage of it. I feel a particular anxiety about my wife's health, and it is time I learn the physiological laws entailed in motherhood, and the subsequent care of the mother and the child. Nay, I shall not be able to live alone. I shall learn to cook and thus relieve my wife of all domestic work till she is well able to move about.

"It is said, 'the woman, when she is in travail has sorrow; but as soon as she is delivered, she remembereth none of the anguish, for the joy that a son is born.' Why only the mother? Yea, the father too, since his affection and hopes are centred round the son. A wise son maketh a glad father. He is a **putra**—one who will save the father from the hell of Puth,—of selfishness?"

Hariharan was unlucky in losing his first-born when it was about three years of age. It was by

accident. The fresh water supply in Madras by municipal taps was so precarious that in some houses the taps were almost at floor-level, and the cistern below ground-level. The child while moving about, went near the uncovered water-cistern, tipped over and was drowned. His own misery was unbearable and he could hardly console his wife. His diary has a quotation from Parnell's 'The Hermit' (where the Heavenly Visitor explains to the hermit who doubted 'Providence's sway' in earthly affairs):

"'But God, to save the father, took the son' (sic). To love the child as ours, and to hope to bring it up to its manhood with no other wish than to unfold its latent talent—is this alone worthy of such punishment as has been visited on me? The Hindu has always worshipped the divine child in the mental image of Balakrishna (Child Krishna) to grow into the full stature of divinity.

"She is en ciente and I shall send her to her father's house to be in the company of her younger brothers and sisters so that she may not brood over her sorrow."

In her absence, to divert his mind, he had taken up the practice of the violin. In his school and college days he had heard so often the music of the Nagaswara, played daily at fixed hours in the temple festivities, and his ears were full of music. He was afraid to learn vocal music lest it should damage his heart. As a handy instrument, he took to the violin as it was then coming into vogue in South India. However, he entertained no tutor to give him initial lessons but tried if he could not learn to play by simply observing the

handling of the violin by professionals in the concerts where the violinist accompanied the vocalist.

Later his diary has the following:—

"I have received the news of the birth of a daughter. I was hoping for a son. Well, she has reproduced herself. My mind recalls the verses in the Ramayana, where Sita describes to Anasuya, the lady hermit, the incidents of her marriage:—

'My sire was vexed with care, as sad
As one who mourns the wealth he had (lost)
Scorn on the maiden's sire must wait
From men of high and low estate.
The virgin's father all despise,
Though Indra's peer who rules the skies.'

"But then, King Janaka was care-worn only after the seasons had flown and the marriage time was nigh. However, as the modern couplet puts it: 'From the very moment the daughter is born she becomes CARE incarnate to the father.' (The word 'care'—*chinta*—is feminine in Sanskrit). The Hindu today thinks of the girl's marriage even at the moment of her birth though it is to come off in a distant future, as he is imbued with the idea that her main function is motherhood and no more. I certainly understand now my father-in-law's state of mind when I offered to marry Chandrika. While pondering thus, I receive a letter from her: "In the midst of my travail, a bairagi (mendicant) of North India happened to call at father's. He asked for food, saying he was very hungry. Instead of hooting him out, father took some compassion on him since he talked in Sanskrit, and he was given a sumptuous feed. Before he left our house the child was born. And when he learnt the news he predicted thus: 'What a pity! the child is a girl. She will be in a position as exalted as a son. Her house will overflow with grain when she comes

of age and marries. She will be good in mathematics. I say this because I know some astrology'." It may be that the hospitality of my father-in-law evoked a genuine emotion in him and he blessed the child. For the time being I am happy. Nevertheless, I doubt whether, like the prophecy of the witches in 'Macbeth', though not for immediate realization, it may not carry a seed of evil in itself. According to my wife's presentiment the child will be named 'Annapoorna'."

Two years later Hariharan had another daughter, again at her father's house where she had gone for her delivery. On this occasion his wife wrote to him the following letter:—

"Father had long been wishing to give 'bhiksha' to Sri Sankaracharya (the High Priest) and worship him at our house. I made obeisance to him in spite of my far gone pregnancy, and sang before the Jagadguru a few verses from the **Soundarya-lahari** of the Adi-Sankara in original Sanskrit. I was blessed by the Jagadguru on that occasion: 'You will give birth to a girl only but she will have great talent like an embodiment of Saraswati herself, and will handle the vina like the Goddess'."

"She has been named Saraswati at my wife's request but the prophecy, as it was the second in regard to the children, perplexes me. Probably the great man with his intuition advises me how I should take in hand the fruition of my children's lives."

* * * *

Two more years lapsed. Annapoorna and Saraswati were moving about the household shedding happiness on their parents. Hariharan had recently been given

a decent rise of pay; he suggested to his wife, shifting to a house with at least a room on the first floor where they could sleep in airy comfort. He had a photograph taken of himself and his wife and another of his two girls. Their married happiness can be judged from the following extract from his diary:

"In the Hindu marriage the young lady is generally modest for years and she gives herself up with only a half consent to man's sexual needs. Later, when a couple of children are born and when the life and individualities of the husband and the wife get attuned by common interests, the wedded wife becomes alluringly immodest in her husband's arms. Happy is the man who is then conscious of the thrills of her ecstatic love for him!"

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When Chandrika gave birth to another daughter. Hariharan felt slightly dejected and noted in his diary:

"What does it matter? The probabilities of a son or a girl are roughly fifty per cent. In South India according to the census, it is eleven girls to ten boys, which will create social problems of its own in the near future. In the Punjab it is just the reverse—eleven boys to ten girls. The purdah may be the cause in Northern India, leading to the loss of female life. Either the freer atmosphere of the woman in South India with no social bar for her to move about for a bath in the rivers, a visit to the temples and the purchase of her domestic needs, or some other causes may be responsible for such variation. Anyway I shall need money to get them suitably married to enable them to live in comfort. Or, I must give them sufficient education to earn their livelihood which will fit them to become teachers in girls' schools which are being

opened by Government and for which necessity is being felt by society. Education itself is getting costlier. My wife writes to me on this occasion: 'An aged married woman, a friend of father's family, came to see me for the **kappu**—adorning the child with bangles—a function on the ninth day of the birth of the child where women take part, and exclaimed, making us all assembled laugh: "Why has Brahma lacked a little bit of more flesh (or clay in Tamil) to make the child a male instead of a female? She is the very image of her father".' May God grant me a long life to bring up these girls to live in comfort. Ananda (meaning Joy) will be her name."

IV

Hariharan spared himself no pains, and the hard work he put in with his full sense of duty was well known in office. All the same he felt he was recompensed poorly as he was unable to put by any money for the benefit of his three girls. He lived his old simple life. He was vegetarian as before and his children had sufficient milk which he had lacked in his own childhood. He took upon himself, outside his office hours, the task of teaching the girls at home which meant a serious preparation and equipment as a model teacher. With the help of his wife who taught the children the elements of Tamil and of Sanskrit at a later stage, he undertook the teaching of Mathematics and English for the primary standards. Naturally this work meant a lot of patience and a schooling of himself. He felt that love alone was insufficient for the rearing of a child and it must be assisted by knowledge. For this reason he studied to some extent modern medicine and hygiene, just to serve as first aid in the absence of a doctor. He had no time for frivolities. Beyond a visit to the sea shore

with his wife and children for fresh air, he had no other engagements.

Hariharan felt that primary schools involved enormous waste of time for talented children. Mass education in schools, he thought, might do for mediocrity. He believed that the State had only usurped the functions of the parent in the matter of elementary education, and if the parent could spare the time and energy he should educate the child in the three R's. Inclination might be wanting in some, but the ideal was worth all costs. For this reason he had not sent his children to school and their education was a home education, besides helping mother.

Again from his diary: "The nervous and cerebral organization of the Brahmin of South India today is highly educable one. It may be due to the agelong heritage of intellectual occupation, or due to a fluke of evolution by close inter-marriage of individuals with such heredity. The plain living and high thinking for generations among the Brahmins might have been conducive to the propagation of such a type of talent. That is the reason why that community was the first to appreciate the opening of Government schools and colleges in which is imparted English education, including the courses in Arts, Science, Medicine, Law and Engineering. And Brahmin parents availed themselves, though at great cost, of the opportunity to maintain their intellectual traditions of the olden days."

* * * *

When Annapoorna was about nine years of age, the following appears in his diary:—"My friend and neighbour Madhavan, a subordinate in the Abkari department just peeped in today, while I was teaching Annapoorna mathematics. His son who had gone abroad on a Government scholarship had come out

successful recently in the open competition of the Indian Civil Service held in London. I apologised to him to let me finish the lesson; he was all the while observing my methods of teaching decimal division to the girl. When Annapoorna had left he remarked: 'I wish my son had shown as much knowledge and taste for mathematics as this girl of yours. He just fumbled through his matriculation and intermediate mathematics, obtaining the barest minimum. It is the subjects, Languages and History, that enabled him to obtain the success at the London Examination. I am quite astonished at her grasp and explanation of the principles involved in working out the decimal division.'

"This brought to my memory the astrological prediction. Naturally, my own mathematical endowment Annapoorna might have inherited, although how the bairagi could have foreseen the mental development of the child in this direction is a mystery."

Music was beginning to be considered a social ornament for family girls also in the richer strata of Brahmin society in towns. So he engaged a music tutor soon after, for Annapoorna and Saraswati who took lessons together. Hariharan's musical talent also took nourishment from listening to and observing the lessons taught to the girls and he was beginning to understand the art better. Saraswati's musical inheritance seemed from the first to be of a high order, as the tutor had observed. Hariharan thus felt that some part of his own mental life had gone into the mental make-up of his girls. The elder with the features of his wife and the younger with those of his mother, each lit him with a glow of happiness mingled with adoration, standing in strange contrast

with his love for members of the older generation with similar features.

By this method of home-education, a number of years of their life was saved for studies in the higher classes. All his children joined straightaway the high school classes. Annapoorna was able to pass her Matriculation examination before she was fourteen years of age, and the other two girls Saraswati and Ananda were just two classes below each. His wife had for some time been pressing him for the marriage of Annapoorna but he was always putting it off. She was delicate even at her age of fourteen years, and to force motherhood on her seemed to him almost a crime. His knowledge of physiology gave him a moral consciousness of his duty towards the girl, and he was always for postponing the marriage. Even the ancient Indian medical authorities regarded sixteen as the minimum age for marriage. Galton himself, in relation to inheritance of talent, strongly held the view that the doctrine of deferred marriage would lead indirectly to most mischievous results that were overlooked owing to the neglect of consideration bearing upon race. He, of course, referred to the late ages of marriage of women of twenty-five or thirty years prevailing in European countries. Hariharan said to himself that Galton could not certainly have meant the deferring of such an early marriage, as has been practised in India, leading to the deterioration of physique in children. Probably the age of seventeen would be the best for marriage, Hariharan thought, taking into account the poorer condition of health generally in India, and the needs of the tropical climate. He explained these reasons to his wife; and the early marriage of Annapoorna was postponed

against the dictate of social custom. So her education was continued in college. In those days separate women's colleges did not exist, and the few women-students who took to higher education had to study in the colleges for boys; and small separate chairs and tables were provided for girls apart from the regular benches and desks for boys. Girls and boys still moved in water-tight compartments and the Indian girls had only to mix with the Anglo-Indian girls in those colleges.

In addition to vocal music, Annapoorna was given lessons at home on the violin and Saraswati on the vina as the national instrument. Perhaps, it was his sub-conscious wish to learn the violin under a tutor that was responsible for the choice of the violin to Annapoorna.

For several years now, his wife had expressed to him his growing ascetic tendencies in relation to herself. The problem of making both ends meet with some saving for the future, she probably did not realize; and he did not want to be visited, as it were, with a troop of girls who should have to be looked after. Suddenly his wife who had for a few years a stomach pain passed away while suffering from an acute attack. Hariharan had a small bromide enlargement made from the photo of his wife, and hung it on a wall in his room; and he was glad that his girls bedecked the same with a garland of flowers every Friday. Soon after his wife's death his pay was raised to two hundred and fifty rupees per mensem, with annual increments rising to four hundred rupees per mensem in ten years.

Suffice it to say for the story that two years later, Annapoorna took a first class in the Intermediate examination, and later still a similar first class in the Bachelor of Arts examination with Mathematics as

optional subject, the subsidiary subjects being English and Sanskrit. By then Saraswati had passed also her Intermediate examination, and Ananda her Matriculation. Saraswati had not secured intellectual honours in her Intermediate, as she had bestowed all her attention on music, which seemed to take most of her leisure at home. Needless also to add that his girls' studies, while at school and college, came under his careful supervision.

At this juncture Hariharan realised he should marry off at least the eldest girl. The four years since their mother's death had been a great problem to him in the matter of his looking after their needs both at home and at college. His own life seemed to be subject, as he thought, to any catastrophe at any moment, and he felt that Annapoorna should be married, so that she might be left in the protection of some young man, and that her womanhood should find fruition in motherhood. As luck would have it, a young man, barely three years older than Annapoorna, a Master of Arts in Physics, whose grand-father was known to Hariharan, offered to marry her. It seemed a windfall to Annapoorna and her father, for the young man, Paramasivan, had some-time ago been adopted by a rich scion of that family, owning over a hundred acres of agricultural land. His adopted father had recently died and the young man desired a highly educated wife to be a proper helpmate to him. Her little violin play, sweet that it was, and her educational career made him choose Annapoorna in preference to other offers from other parents, who would bestow on him large sums of money. At the time of her marriage, as a token of his love, Hariharan handed as stri-dhana just an acre and a half of agricultural land which he had purchased out of his savings.

The marriage took place at a temple, as he was not rich enough to defray any extravagant expense, and Hariharan has the following note in his diary:

"It has been my ardent wish, almost since her birth that she should be happily married. Hindu marriage ceremonial, as it is found to-day among the Brahmins of South India, seems purposely designed to give the maximum of sadness to the parents. The only portion of the ritual in Sanskrit that is understood, except for the worship of the son-in-law as the honoured guest, symbolising him as Lord Vishnu, is the statement made by the father of the girl. The mother too participates in the ceremonial, if alive, standing close to and touching the father with the darbha or grass. "I, the son of so-and-so, the grandson of so-and-so, belonging to so-and-so gotra, unto so-and-so, the son of so-and-so and the grand-son of so-and-so and of so-and-so gotra, this girl of mine give" The word 'give' occurs at the end of the sentence, and it chokes the father's throat. The gift, which is the Brahminic form of marriage, is considered the greatest gift of all by man, as is proclaimed in the ritual for the realization by the youth of righteousness, wealth, love and salvation. The young bride, who has hitherto been the joy of the father's home, whose needs and comforts have been attended to from infancy to adolescence, whose happy childhood has been the sole aim in the life of her parents is now proposed as a gift, practically to a stranger. The impending separation, the vague future of her family life in her husband's home, whether she would be tenderly cared for by her husband, or left uncared for, or treated as a chattel, what actual physical and mental privations may befall her in her husband's home, whether she would pass away from this world as a Sumangali (i.e., while her husband is alive), the

immense horrors of Hindu widowhood—all these thoughts flit in such rapid succession within the second of time as the word 'give' is pronounced. Oh, what a sad experience for the father! This experience is not unique, as I am told, but what every affectionate parent has felt in this Hindu world."

* * * *

Soon after her consummation, Paramasivan came into possession of several more acres of agricultural land as a reversioner. Thus the prophecy, in the case of Annapoorna, was fulfilled. She left for a village very near a mofussil town to live with her husband.

Saraswati did not want to continue her higher collegiate education, and she insisted that she would study only the musical art. The avenues for family girls in the field of music for earning a livelihood were not free from danger. Yet Hariharan did not want to force her education in a field other than her own inclination. So he engaged special music tutors who were heirs to the musical tradition of the land. Her stay at home during his stay in office, and Ananda's study in college created some difficulties.

I became Hariharan's family doctor, sometime before Chandrika's death. My wife and I took charge of this girl when Hariharan was away at office and I then got to know the family well. My practice, as it was mounting up, brought me into contact with very many families in Madras, and Saraswati, after Annapoorna's marriage, was a constant companion of my wife, in her mid-day visits to other ladies.

In one of these calls Saraswati renewed her old acquaintance with a girl class fellow in the lower classes in school with just a smattering of education and married years ago. This lady had a brother, Sadasivan, who had just finished his law course. His parents offered to take Saraswati as a bride for their

son, a year and a half later. So she too was married, and was off Hariharan's hands. The marriages of Annapoorna and Saraswati, as the girls were chosen for their own human qualities and attainments, made Hariharan less bitter towards the world. He became aware that goodness still prevailed in this Hindu world with its sense of human values.

Hariharan did not find much of a musical taste in Ananda and so did not spend much money on her for a musical education. Her tastes were more literary, and she took a high place, obtaining very high marks both in English and Sanskrit, in her Intermediate examination. She was willing to continue her collegiate course. After she had taken her Bachelor of Arts degree examination—it was about four years after Annapoorna's success—while he was cogitating as to her future, I intervened and desired that she should be married too as she was eighteen years of age. I selected a young man, who had taken his Engineering degree, Sivaraman by name, the son of the manager of the Surgeon-General's office.

The question of Varadakshina (gift for the bridegroom) loomed large, however, in her case. Now that Hariharan had put in about twenty-seven years' service, he was thinking of taking some leave preparatory to retirement after he could fix up Ananda in her life. The father of Sivaraman, I found, was a perfect Jew, and he desired to recoup himself as much money as had been spent on his son's education. Knowing full well the circumstances of Hariharan, he argued: "Why should Hariharan want any more money, as his monthly pension of roughly about one hundred and seventy-five rupees should more than suffice for his needs?"

Hariharan, after Annapoorna's marriage, in meeting the cost of the other girls' education had not

put by much. The little he had saved was spent in pulling down his mother's mud cottage, full of rat holes at Jambukeswaram, and putting up a decent ventilated structure with brick walls, but not of any larger accommodation.

Hariharan was perplexed as his own views on the varadakshina question were peculiar. He felt that it was clearly a want of self-respect, which made the parents of boys so parasitical upon the parents of girls. True, the law of the land does not provide any inheritance of the father's property by girls, but the cost of their marriage has to be met from family funds. He felt that if there was any provision in Hindu law like the Mahomedan law, by which a girl also inherited a portion of her father's property, all this bickering about money at the time of marriage would cease, for then it would be to the interest of the bride-groom's party that the girl's money was not wasted, and the extravagant marriage expenses, causing a waste of the accumulated capital, would be avoided. He also believed that in a social system where agriculture was the mainstay of the people, and marriage was the only economic salvation for woman, the son's interest had perforce to be sacrificed for the sake of the girl, and that, in the interests and safety of the institution of the family. This probably explained the attitude of parents who were fathers of boys; and it is a case of tit for tat.

The only recourse, he thought, would be to retire before due time, commute a third of his pension permissible under rules and hand it over as the bridegroom's price—a sum of eight thousand rupees—and the following conversation took place between myself and Hariharan:

I: "Everywhere in the world, brides have to be given away with a dowry. When the English institution

presents an example, why should you decry the system prevalent in Indian society of the bridegroom's price?"

H: "There is this much difference. **Varasulka** is money forced out of the girl's parent. The English dowry is a gift to the woman by the father and is her sole property. The money is freely given, because the father finds by observation during their courtship that the bridegroom will conduct himself properly to the bride, and his girl, with a ninety per cent chance, would be quite happy with her chosen young man. It is a free gift, because he is satisfied that the girl may have the benefit of his savings to stand them in good stead on a rainy day. Here in India, **Varasulkam** is all generally spent in tamasha or foppery by the guardians of the youth. Neither the boy nor the girl reaps any benefit therefrom. It is a case of 'light come, light go' for the young man's parents."

I: "Suppose it is a case of a non-earning boy, would you not always contribute to his purse if he does not sufficiently earn? That is why occasional doles are expected from the girl's parents to the girl even after marriage."

H: "Eh! the Hindu wife is a cook, a bedmate, a nurse, a servant, a helpmate, a dhobi and what-not to her husband. And she should not be provided by her husband for these services! To what extent has parasitism become prevalent in our society! When will a more-self-respecting people be born in this land of ours? The institution which makes the father of the girl seek for a young man to marry his daughter with absolute want of self-respect, and ask one parent after another, is so debasing of character; is it not so?"

Hariharan was, however, diffident that his age might be weighted and the amount of the commutation of pension be thus decreased. But the father of the young man somehow managed it with the medical

authorities and he got the normal amount of commutation.

Hariharan, however, insisted that he would give it according to the ancient law of the land as a **stri-dhana**, purchasing agricultural land therefor for the benefit of his daughter. The marriage took place later on, the young man's father agreeing to this condition. Hariharan was only sorry that he could not so far confer any monetary gift on Saraswati.

Hariharan had not taken to the practice of the violin very seriously. For nearly twelve years all told, the music lessons at his house for Annapoorna and Saraswati had given him sufficient enjoyment and understanding of the art. Latterly, Saraswati's play on the vina during the couple of years before her marriage verily transported him. After Saraswati's departure for her husband's home, having had only Ananda to look after, he began again the practice of the violin, but did not make much progress. He got often disgusted with his own efforts, and occasionally hummed to himself the tunes he had so frequently heard.

After Ananda left for her husband's home, he gave a small party to his compeers in office, as he was leaving Madras for good. A curious idea then took possession of him (and I was one of the invitees) that he should entertain them with his own violin-play, in the belief that he had made some decent progress in the last two and a half years. After about fifteen minutes of recital, he put away the violin with tears in his eyes. His friends thought he was emotionally moved by his impending departure from their midst and the break-up of his family life, and as he was now entering into a new phase of life after retirement. Little did they understand what brought tears to his eyes. It was his own disgust of his violin-play, his

inability to rouse any emotion in the listeners, and of the passing idea that he was a mere scraper, and though his ear was true, his fingers refused to reproduce precisely those sounds of which he had the inward sense.

V

"Eighteen long years have I lived since retirement at Jambukeswaram, practically cut off from my children, though occasionally looking them up and the grand-children born to Annapoorna and Saraswati, and mainly spent in the study of Sanskrit works on Psychology and Philosophy and the tendering of obeisance to my Maker.

"As I take stock of my life work, I feel I have mis-spent my life. At the time of Annapoorna's consummation, as she bowed down before me for a blessing, I said, "Mayest thou be a mother of savants, like Lord Rayleigh or Clerk Maxwell.' The people around me laughed. I did not force higher mathematical education on my daughter. What with Paramasivan's knowledge of Physics and what with Annapoorna's aptitude for Mathematics, I had hoped that their children would be creators of knowledge. It was my sub-conscious wish that such talented children might be born of them, which found vent in my words. Is not the scientific man of the modern age, who lives an ascetic life as compared with the industrial magnate, comparable to the monk of the middle ages, or the ancient Brahmin with his Sanskritic lore? Are there not cases of the landed aristocracy of Britain, who have become great and distinguished mathematicians and scientists? I hoped that Annapoorna and Paramasivan would create in their home that scientific atmosphere for their children, and yet no such promise has been shown by the youths.

"How was it that the married women in ancient Greece were living only at their homes, while the famous and gifted women were hetaerae, visited by the great talented men? And yet, the Greeks were a talented race with a very much higher average level of intelligence according to Galton, than any race thereafter living on this globe. Were our forefathers right in believing that women's talent should be more or less potential, be however striving, and yet not become kinetic?

"What is Annapoorna doing to-day? Besides being a mother, she is just a ledger-keeper, as it were, of the accounts of the various lessees of their agricultural land. What use her study of Mathematics has been put to! She just plays her violin in the silence of the night and occasionally forgets herself in ecstasy. Is her music simply an anodyne to what her mental activities might have been towards her children? What an end to my aspirations and hopes for the future citizens!

"Saraswati had married into a family where, I thought, her musical talent would be appreciated and she would be an ornament and an elevating force in society. Sadasivan, with his independent life as an advocate in the presidency town, might have fostered her talent to enrich the world's enjoyment. What does he do but give up his advocate-ship, and choose a lucrative job in the management of a factory where the din and noise is such that Saraswati has even to play her vina as atma-vidya (soul-knowledge) with the doors of her residence closed! Sadasivan is somehow imbued with the ideals of Sri M. C. Bhagavathar, who taught in his harikathas (stories of saints) that a family woman's talent and musical expression is only for the husband to enjoy and not for the world. She has given birth so far only to

sons, who are being trained as technicians in the factory, and has not even a single daughter to whom she could teach her high art, to pass on the musical tradition to the next generation.

"I have not seen Ananda for years. Owing to the slight mental uneasiness, in regard to the finding of funds to give her away in marriage, for the first time I consulted an astrologer, whether her marriage with Sivaraman would be propitious. He approved of the alliance; all the same, he forewarned me that the youngster's life was a *sakata-yoga*, either connected with the movement of wheels, or similar to the motion of a wheel, implying ups and downs in his career. This forecast only confirmed my disposition to endow the girl only, though the youngster's father expressed to me his conviction that a woman should be entirely dependent upon her husband even for her smallest needs, which only would bring about happiness in family life. During her marriage ritual, one particular mantra drew my attention, which I had not noticed on the previous occasions, namely the request to the bridegroom that in case the father of the girl died sonless, one son of the daughter might be given in adoption to the girl's parent. (The ritual apparently provided for the later offer of water and of food through fire, by a person bearing the germ of the departed soul.)

"Knowing the fact of Ananda's facial resemblance to myself and her inheritance of Chandrika's linguistic endowment, I had often wished to adopt one of her sons if they were born, as it might bear some physical resemblance to myself. Sivaraman, having had a special training in railway engineering, started life in Northern India far away from home. He was employed in various railway road construction programmes and shifted from one railway construction

to another, as it offered more pay for his special experience. Sometimes he was out of employment too. I did not know for a long time that something or other went wrong with Ananda during her terms of pregnancy and that there were abortions. On the advice of some doctor in Northern India, both her ovaries were removed by operation. So I have no son of hers to offer libations for me, when I shall be no more in the land of the living. At her own suggestion, perhaps, Sivaraman has married a second time, as the law and custom permit, and recently settled to a permanent job in a railway open for traffic. Poor Ananda is satisfied that she has had his first love and that she is still his **Dharma Patni** (wife), and is spending her days, doting on her step-children.

"All my efforts for and hopes of my girls have gone to waste, as ghee poured over ashes without blazing forth. I had no special craving for money or material wealth, and if I earned more than what was sufficient for my needs, it was only to provide the means for healthy living and the satisfaction of the primary wants of life. Any saving was intended for and spent on the education of children. The civilization of India has been thrown off its wheels.

"Under the domination of modern democratic ideas, the caste system in India has come in for a lot of abuse, but critics forget that the industrial revolution of the West has brought on a differentiation of classes, based purely on wealth, in the capitalistic system of society. Western thinkers have not yet understood the levels in the cerebral organization of men, and the psychological insight of Manu into human nature. Plato in his idealistic state would divide the people into four divisions of the philosopher-statesman, the soldier, the merchant and

the slave. Even as late as early nineteenth century, Ruskin similarly divided human society into four strata of the pastor or the priest, the soldier, the merchant and the labourer.

"Again, the Hindu Law prevented by its provisions the huge accumulation of capital. The right of primo-geniture did not apply here. Capital was mostly agricultural land; it has to be divided equally among the sons, the son being a co-parcener at the very birth in South India, thus tending to equalization, and non-accumulation in one individual (though this feature of the law presents its own difficulties in the fragmentation of land). The standard of living was purposely kept low from the priest right down to the labourer, except perhaps for the kings or those in power. Even the riches of royalty were spent in fostering works of Art, and there was nothing like exploited labour in the country as far as possible, for everyone took delight in his handiwork. The Brahmins taught religion with the three tenets in its application to human living, 'Restrain thy passion (lust), restrain thy anger and do not covet.' The large gifts made on occasions both at the birth of a child and the death of a man or woman, never left much room for accumulation of capital with a view to enslave and indenture labour; for giving away to the needy in charity is Dharma. The Hindu structure of society was socialistic and in a sense communistic. It understood that all things of human value like literature, poetry, art, science, medicine, music and ethical conduct had to be lived for and their tradition handed down by specially gifted men for the benefit of the entire population. We, Indians, are apt to forget, and European nations have not yet realized the fact that civilization exposes the ablest of our votaries to an extreme temptation, the temptation of luxury. As we

raise our standard of living, the more expensive become the maintenance and education of our children, and we become more and more tempted to spend on ourselves what would be sacrificed in raising another generation.

"Research workers, doctors, scientists, poets, artists, educationists with such intellectual and ethical proclivities are really the salt of the earth. Western ideas, forced on the mind of India, do not take cognizance of the levels of cerebral organization of men, and their different functions in life. The thinkers of today have to take these mental facts into consideration and integrate human activity into a happy world community. Civilization will only then survive. The most alarming circumstance in our midst today is the steady rise in the cost of higher education. No society can afford to starve out, by means fair or foul, the budding types of men just referred to. The pursuit of wealth does not tend towards racial betterment, and hence the social ladder ought not to be based upon wealth.

"I feel I have missed my profession. I should have been a teacher, as in the job I originally took up, stimulating the minds of the young, especially boys, for higher work in the fields of intellect. I did not realise that woman is the embodiment of the stolid ovum and man of the mobile spermatozoon. It is the male who can rise to giddy heights, either in poetry, art, or science for the uplift of humanity. Yet my girls have been good wives unto their husbands, as the Ramayana has taught them, identifying themselves with their husbands' interests. I have been cheated, however, of the fruits of my work in the higher education of the girls. The words of Tennyson, 'What comfort is in me? I have lived my life, and that which I have done, may He within Himself make pure,' I

can only repeat. They are the words of heart-broken King Arthur, whose work too, in the creation of a new order of society under the chivalrous ideal, had been entirely frustrated. I now clearly see why Chandrika stopped with the words of the Lord Krishna in the Gita, 'I AM THE GAMBLING OF THE CHEAT.' Yes, I too have cheated the Lord. After Ananda's marriage, I was more than once tempted to marry again, when I was fifty-two years of age, for it was not uncommon in the land for old men to marry young girls. If I had done so, the Lord might have sent me an imbecile son. But my heart bled as I recollected the lines of the Gujarati poet, Vallabha, about the sorrows of a girl-wife to an old man:

'Goddess mother, why was I not strangled at birth,
why was I not poisoned?

Yet if my husband die, it is my part to be true to
death.

Nay, Goddess mother, with joined hands I pray at
thy feet,

When I am born again, give me a husband that
is young and strong.'

"I too have to bear my cross, and the Son of Man
shall have nowhere to lay his head."

* * * *

These are almost the last words of his notes. I wonder why he chose me as the trustee for his house and meagre funds. Is it the destiny that I am the son of my father, who had tantalised Hariharan with the offer of marriage of my elder sister long ago? His last request to me was that a photo of his on the bier might be taken, and a copy sent to each of his daughters that they might pray for his soul.

Madras,
October, 1943.

KUMARA GURU.

